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DE RUEHBS #3353 3201717
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FM USEU BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON
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RUEHDIR/IRAN RPO DUBAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 003353

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STATE ALSO FOR KATE LURIE - DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2017
TAGS: PHUM EAID PREL PGOV KDEM IR EUN
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO DEMARCHE ON EU HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE
WITH IRAN

REF: STATE 154555

Classified By: Unit Chief Vincent Carver for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) Summary: Absent significant progress on the nuclear file, EU officials doubted that Iran or the EU could muster enough political will to resurrect the now-moribund bilateral human rights exchange. End Summary

11. (C) On November 13, PolOffs met with DG RELEX Iran Deputy Director Francois Massoulie to deliver reftel points on a possible EU human rights dialogue on Iran. Massoulie, just back from a three-day trip to Iran with RELEX Deputy Director General for the European Neighborhood Policy, Relations with Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, Middle East, and South Mediterranean Hugues Mingarelli, was unequivocally pessimistic about prospects for resumption of the EU-Iran human rights dialogue in the short term. Without significant Iranian progress towards compliance with UNSC resolutions and cooperation with the IAEA, he doubted whether either party could resurrect the bilateral human rights exchange. Underscoring his point, Massoulie said that the Iranian MFA cancelled DDG Mingarelli's scheduled meeting with the MFA Director General for Human Rights in Tehran. Moreover, in meetings with other Iranian officials, EU officials observed a distinct shift toward a more strident, &in your face attitude in Iranian diplomacy. Ahmadinejad's less sophisticated, true-believer cronies have been replacing the more skillful career civil servants, deteriorating the caliber of the EU's interlocutors.

13. (C) Based on his stops in Qom as well as Tehran, Massoulie believed that the overall situation for civil society in Iran has declined since his last trip in February 2007. Journalists and labor activists were under increasing pressure from the regime and consciously seeking to lower their public profile. Commission officials also encountered difficulties meeting with UN counterparts to discuss, among other things, an EU-funded UNDP project on governance that supports academics, bar associations, and journalists. The Iranians also cancelled a meeting with a Majlis committee to discuss potential scientific cooperation. The Commission came away with the message from Tehran that EU proliferation-related sanctions were chilling the prospects for cooperation in other areas. Finally, Massoulie undertook to explore the possibility of a Commission statement on the Salehi and Khorsandi cases and requested any further background that we could provide.

14. (C) On November 16, PolOff met with Nicole Reckinger, who covers Iran in the European Council Human Rights Unit. Reckinger dismissed the possibility of a human rights dialogue starting in the near future, though confirmed it is a &constant interest of the Europeans to resume talks. The last time her office approached the Iranians on this issue was in 2005. After a year of negotiations, they agreed on a December 2006 meeting, but the Iranians cancelled at the last moment, claiming anti-Iranian bias on the part of the EU. She confirmed the replacement of Iranian career diplomats with hard-liners, and the general deterioration of the human rights situation there. She also mentioned that the Iranian desk officer in the Council, Didier Cosse, was planning a follow-up visit to the Commission's trip; no date has been set.

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